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AUTHOR Ferratier, Louis; Helmich, Edith
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ABSTRACT

On account of concern about declining achievement levels of high school graduates and proposed state legislation increasing graduation requirements to address this concern, this report analyzes current and proposed high school graduation requirements in Illinois, based on data compiled from local school documents, and compares the data to statistics nationwide, from other states, and from selected urban schools. Major findings are as follows: (1) Illinois' 16 unit requirement falls at midpoint relative to other states; (2) 75 percent of the states exceed Illinois requirements in English, math, science, and social studies; (3) only two schools exceed the requirements specified in proposed state legislation; (4) the proposed legislation is unduly restrictive for college-bound and non-college-bound students alike; (5) the proposals necessitate extensive modification of existing policies over a short time for schools lacking adequate resources to make such adjustments; (6) there is no evidence that increasing requirements affects student performance (in fact, there is evidence to the contrary). The study concludes that the quantity of graduation requirements has no discernible effect on achievement, whereas an outcome-based approach, specifying performance expectations, is more likely to achieve desired improvements. (TE)

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AN ANALYSIS OF ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Illinois State Board of Education

Edward Copeland, Chairman
State Board of Education

Donald G. Gill
State Superintendent of Education

Springfield, Illinois
June 15, 1983

EA 016 249

Foreword

In response to a request for information regarding high school graduation requirements in Illinois, a staff report was prepared for the State Board of Education and presented to board members at the June 23, 1983, board meeting. This analysis of graduation requirements in Illinois, other states, the nation and selected large city schools can be a useful resource to educators in general and, thus, copies of the report to the State Board members, with some minimal changes, are being made available to interested educators.

The report was prepared by staff from the Research and Statistics Section, Department of Planning, Research and Evaluation. Louis Ferratier, Ph.D., and Edith Helmich, M.A., were responsible for compiling and analyzing data, conducting a review of the literature, and writing the report. Documents were obtained from schools as part of the Census of Secondary School Course Offerings and Enrollments study.

Thanks and acknowledgement are given to the 702 principals of junior and senior high schools in Illinois for providing the documentation and information needed for this and related other studies.

Donald G. Gill

State Superintendent of Education

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AN ANALYSIS OF
ILLINOIS HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Background

High school graduation requirements are a major issue in education. National attention has been generated by the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, among others. The Education Commission of the States reports that Indiana, Kentucky, and Virginia are among the states currently examining state level graduation requirements. In Illinois, legislation has been introduced in both houses of the General Assembly (S.B. 0669 and H.B. 1179) which would mandate high school graduation requirements beyond those now in effect (See Appendix A for copies of these bills).

Although each generation down through history has criticized the quality of education, current arguments seem to rely very heavily on declining test scores as evidence that student achievement has declined.

At least two different approaches to using the authority of the state are being proposed in response to this problem. The first approach is to raise achievement by adding to the courses students must take in high school, decreasing elective courses, or changing the amount of time spent on certain activities. Lengthening the school day and school year, increasing graduation requirements, and assigning more homework are further examples of this approach to control the school environment and factors which seem to affect the learning process. These solutions focus on "inputs", those factors which enter into the process.

The second approach, not as well known as a state initiative, but gaining in popularity, attempts to raise achievement by specifying what is expected of students in terms of performance, knowledge, skills, etc. This approach recognizes that students vary in the abilities, experiences and interests they bring to the classroom. Most importantly, this approach recognizes that students will vary in the amount of time it takes them to learn. This approach focuses on "outcomes". The number of actual courses required of all students is irrelevant in this approach, since instruction, and the time devoted to it, is dependent on the needs of individual students or group of students.

This outcome approach is currently being used by the Coordinating Board of the Texas College and University System, the Louisiana Board of Regents, and the College Board's Educational EQuality Project. While these three associations target the outcomes toward college bound students, the concept is not limited to the college bound nor is it new. Performance based or behavioral objectives use this approach. Benjamin Bloom, nationally known educator, encompasses this concept in his mastery learning approach where performance outcomes are specified and instructional time is varied to allow for individual differences in the learning rates of students. Sometime ago, in its study of instructional program mandates in Illinois, the State Board of Education concluded that the state's interest in education would be better directed at what students should know and be able to do as a consequence of their education than toward prescribing how many courses of what length they should take.

Given the extent of the interest in graduation requirements, and since the approach taken by the State Board of Education is substantially different from that which is illustrated in S.B. 0669 and H.B. 1179, State Board of Education staff accelerated its study of graduation requirements in Illinois, including state requirements and those which are required at the local level.

The staff analysis includes a description of the proposed requirements (S.B. 0669 and H.B. 1179), the current state and local requirements, a comparison of Illinois requirements with the nation, other states, and selected large city schools, and a description of the methodology for data collection and analysis.

Current and Proposed Requirements

Graduation requirements in Illinois are governed by both statutes and regulations. They have evolved over more than a 60 year period but are similar to those established in 1920 by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Current statutes require that students at the secondary level must take the following courses or subjects:

Patriotism & Principles of Representative Government (School Code 27-4)	1 hr. per week
Physical Education (School Code 27-6)	Daily
Consumer Education (School Code 27-12.1)	Document 1 (4-2.14) Requires a course (or equivalent) including instruction in installment purchasing, budgeting, comparison of prices and an understanding of the roles of consumers interacting with agriculture, business, trade unions and government in formulating and achieving the goals of the free enterprise system, such course (or equivalent) to encompass not less than nine weeks and to be completed during grades 10-12.

Safety Education (School Code 27-17, 27-22) 30 hours

Subject areas which must be taught to students but which may be included in other courses as a component of the total content are:

Conservation of natural resources (School Code, 27-13.1)	) There are no time or specific content requirements.
History of the United States (School Code 27-21)	)

All other secondary course requirements for students are mandated either by ISBE's Document 1 or local districts' requirements.

Current state regulations (Document 1) for secondary school graduation require at least 16 units of study where a unit is equivalent to a daily period of study throughout the school year:

4 Units of Physical Education
3 Units of English
1 Unit of Government/History/Patriotism
1/2 Unit Health Education) Wording does not specify
1/4 Unit Consumer Education) a separate course.
Electives sufficient to bring total units to 16

There are currently no statutes or regulations for mathematics or science as a requirement for graduation. Local school districts may require these and other subjects, however.

The proposed legislation (S.B. 0669/H.B. 1179), prior to amendment, would establish the following minimum course requirements as prerequisites to graduation.

Four-year High School	Three-year High School
3 years of language arts	2 years of language arts
2 years of mathematics	2 years of mathematics
2 years of science	2 years of science
2 years of social studies	2 years of social studies
1 year of music, art or foreign language	1 year of music, art or foreign language

Since there are no bills being currently considered which would waive or alter the current requirements (as in physical education, health, safety or consumer education), these requirements must be viewed as additions to the current mandates.

Major Findings

Six major findings were drawn from the analyses:

1. In comparison with other states, Illinois, in its 16 unit requirement, falls at about the mid-point of other states. Nearly a quarter of the states do not specify the number of units required for graduation at all, a quarter require 16, and nearly 45% require between 17 and 22.5 units. S.B. 0669/H.B. 1179 do not address units per se. Interestingly, eighty percent of Illinois public high schools require more than the 16 units mandated by the state for graduation.

2. When academic areas are considered separately, almost half to nearly 75% of the states exceed Illinois' requirements in English, math, science, and social studies. The Illinois physical education requirement exceeds those of all but two other states.

3. Only two schools -- University of Illinois High School at Urbana and University High School at Illinois State University, Normal -- meet or exceed the exact requirements specified in the legislation proposed under S.B. 0669/H.B. 1179. There are eighteen high schools which meet all requirements except for fine arts and foreign language. After fine arts, the requirement in social studies would be most difficult for Illinois high schools to meet. Nearly one-half ofthe schools require only one year of social studies.

4. While the proposed legislation clearly has an academic orientation, even college bound students in a 16 unit high school would have difficulty completing 2 years of foreign language, four years each of English, math and science with the requirements established by S.B. 0669/H.B. 1179 unless current requirements for physical education, driver's education, health education, and/or consumer education were waived since they would also have to take one other social studies course. Further, research has shown that taking only one year in a foreign language (an option in the proposed legislation) may be inefficient since it is generally agreed that fluency and competence cannot be obtained in a single year. Non-college bound students would be limited to about two units of electives in vocational education, or general education, since the legislation would require similar schedules for all Illinois students, regardless of individual career goals or aptitudes.

5. Many Illinois schools would have to modify several significant policies in order to implement the specific requirements of the legislation under consideration. They would have to lengthen the school day or school calendar in the absence of state commitment of increased resources; shorten the class periods to have more subjects scheduled in the same

amount of time; decrease the units currently required in certain subjects, such as physical education, or provide credit through sources external to the school (community college, life experience, correspondence school, proficiency exams, etc.). While some of these modifications have merit, most also have fiscal implications. Significant changes in present policy and practice at the school level would need to occur in a short period of time to accommodate these changes.

6. Last, and undoubtedly most important, there is no evidence that increasing graduation requirements affects student academic performance. In fact, there is some evidence to the contrary. Illinois and national data show that there is a weak or inconsistent relationship between graduation requirements and student achievement. This is a most disturbing finding since it is counter to most conventional wisdom. Nationally, there is evidence that school districts with higher achievement have fewer graduation requirements, while districts with lower student achievement levels tend to use higher graduation requirements, probably in an effort to raise achievement. Graduation requirement policy can be quantified and controlled; it is "do-able". The very simplicity of this approach may be misleading as a solution to a highly complex problem.

   Further, the statistic most frequently used in the Press and in public debate to justify the existence of a crisis in achievement, SAT scores, for years has shown Illinois to be above the national average despite its lower requirements for graduation. Therefore, it is concluded that specifying the graduation requirements that every Illinois student must complete cannot be relied upon, within any degree of assurance, to raise achievement scores. Further additions to required courses, despite their laudable intent, could create a false sense of security about the degree to which improvement in student achievement has been addressed. This, in turn, could produce an unwarranted complacency and result in a lack of will to address other more fundamental changes in the system.

Methodology and Staff Analysis of Data

The primary purposes of this analysis are to describe the current graduation requirements in Illinois public high schools, compare these requirements with those in the nation and other states, and with the requirements as proposed in S.B. 0669 and H.B. 1179.

Methodology

Information regarding graduation requirements and policies were obtained directly from documents from 702 schools (governed by approximately 600 school district boards of education). The documents were submitted to the State Board of Education as support material for the Census of Secondary School Course Offerings which focused upon the school rather than the district as the unit of analysis. Surprisingly, while it was assumed that the graduation requirements of all schools within the jurisdiction of the same school district would be identical, the compilation of school graduation requirements identified five school districts with different graduation requirements applicable to each school. While only eleven schools out of more than 700 statewide were affected, this unexpected finding warrants further study.

Typically, this information was part of a student handbook or curriculum guide usually provided to parents and students. Staff were trained to review handbooks and to code the specific requirements by school. (See Appendix B for a copy of the coding forms.)

A review of the literature was conducted. In addition, telephone inquiry to representatives of selected large city schools and two state education agencies were made to obtain further information. Two states, Indiana and Kentucky, were recently involved in studies of graduation requirements and state agency staff from these states provided information on national trends and practices.

There were two limitations in the data. One limitation is that the materials submitted may have been incomplete, i.e., some policies may not have been reported in the documents. It was assumed, however, that student handbooks and curriculum guides would be the most logical sources of information for graduation requirements. This assumption was valid for 96% of the schools.

A second limitation is that many local documents were not dated and, thus, requirements may have changed since the 1981-82 school year. Typically, new requirements do not take effect until a four-year span has elapsed in order to allow sufficient time for students to schedule courses in a sequence compatible with the changes. The data reported represent graduation requirements as of the 1981-82 school year or as sent to this office during that school year.

Analysis of Data

Illinois Data

The majority of public high schools are organized on a semester system with quarterly grade reporting. Graduation requirements are most often specified in terms of credits or units of instruction that are defined within the context of the local organizational structure. This causes much diversity in the definitions of credits and units of instruction among the schools. For example, there is no minimum or maximum amount of instructional time represented by a unit since class periods vary among schools from 40 to 60 minutes and the number of days schools are in session also varies to some extent. The traditional "Carnegie Unit" definition is not uniformly applied in Illinois schools.

As a result of this diversity, the course requirements specified in school documents were converted by state board staff to a uniformly defined unit. For the purpose of this report, a unit is defined as one class period of daily instruction for a full school year for courses accruing graduation credit. Courses involving less than one year of daily study, or courses for which schools awarded less than one unit of credit for a full year of participation, are reported in fractions of a unit.

Table 1 shows the total minimum units for graduation required by local schools in Illinois. There were 24 schools where graduation requirements were not specified For those schools reporting, the range of minimal units begins at 13 units (for three year high schools) and extends from 16 to 24 units for four year high schools, with 66.5% of schools requiring between 16 and 18.75 units. Twenty-nine percent of schools require 19 or more units for graduation. Although state requirements specify 16 units (for four year high schools), more than 80% of schools exceed this minimal requirement.

Table 1: Minimum Units Required for Graduation in Illinois Public High Schools

No. of Units	No. of Schools	(% of Schools)
0 (none indicated in handbooks)	24	(3.6)
*13-15.00	3	(0.3)
16	95	(14.0)
16.50	7	(0.1)
17-17.75	146	(21.6)
18-18.75	202	(29.8)
19-19.75	78	(11.5)
20-20.75	84	(12.4)
21-21.75	15	(2.2)
22	16	(2.4)
23	1	(0.1)
24	3	(0.4)
Total	674	(100)

(Mean = 17.44; Median = 18.00; Mode = 18.00)

*3-year high schools

A common practice was to classify the courses/subjects required for graduation into two broad areas: academic and non-academic courses and/or activies. Among the high schools following this practice, the subject areas of English, math, science and social studies are universally included in the academic category. Other subject areas such as vocational subjects, art, music, foreign languages, P.E., health, driver's education, consumer education, band and chorus are variously included or excluded by local policies which determine the awarding of academic units for graduation. In this report, the category of academic subjects is defined as including only the subject areas of English, math, science and social studies, while all other subject areas and activities generating units toward required graduation totals are classified as other required courses.

Academic subject requirements are shown in Table 2. Where no units are required, analysis is inconclusive since the submitted material may have failed to indicate requirements, or the school policies may not include a particular subject area in graduation requirements. In some instances, requirements were written in such vague or confusing terms that it was not possible to precisely determine the requirements.

Table 2 shows that 28.4% of schools have English requirements exceeding the state requirement of 3 units. Approximately 10% of schools require two units or more each of mathematics and science, while 90% of the schools require at least one unit each of mathematics and science. Ninety-six percent of the schools require at least one unit of social studies, while 14% require three or more units.

Table 2: Units Required for Specific Academic Subject Areas

No. of Required Units	No. of Schools Requiring Units							
	English		Math		Science		Soc. Sts.	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
0.00	22	(3.2)	38	(5.6)	57	(8.4)	24	(3.5)
.50			3	(.4)	8	(1.2)	2	(.3)
1.00			562	(83.4)	528	(78.3)	163	(24.2)
1.25							2	(.3)
1.50			6	(.9)	9	(1.3)	129	(19.1)
1.75					1	(.1)	2	(.3)
2.00	3	(.4)	64	(9.5)	70	(10.4)	233	(34.6)
2.50	1	(.1)					*24	(3.5)
3.00	456	(67.7)	1	(.1)	1	(.1)	92	(13.6)
3.50	43	(6.4)					3	(.4)
4.00	146	(21.7)						
4.50	1	(.1)						
5.00	1	(.1)						
6.00	1	(.1)						
Total	674	(100)	674	(100)	674	(100)	674	(100)
	Mean=3.16		Mean=1.05		Mean=1.03		Mean=1.75	
	Median=3.00		Median=1.00		Median=1.00		Median=2.00	
	Mode=3.00		Mode=1.00		Mode=1.00		Mode=2.00	

*Soc. Sts. 2.50 unit category includes units exceeding 2.00 but less than 2.50.

**Median and Mode scores have been rounded to the nearest unit or fraction thereof.

Other subject areas required by state regulation are reported in Table 3. Although all students must participate in these courses, the decision to grant credit toward graduation as well as the amount of credit granted for successful completion is left to district discretion. Typically, health and consumer education are one semester courses, while safety is often a component of the driver education course. No credit is given toward graduation for health or consumer education by approximately one-third of the schools, but from 64-70% of schools award either a quarter or half unit for these courses. More than half of the schools do not award units of credit for safety. Physical education generates the broadest range of units despite state regulations which require daily class participation in all schools for the entire four years. More than 25% of schools exclude units in physical education from graduation requirements. On the other extreme, 16% of schools allow 4 units of physical education to accrue toward graduation requirements.

Table 3: Units Required for Other Subject Areas

No. of Required Units	No. of Schools Requiring Units							
	Health		Consumer Ed.		Safety		P.E.	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
0.0	190	(28.2)	221	(32.8)	381	(56.5)	175	(26.0)
.25	*14	(2.0)	*36	(5.3)	108	(16.0)	1	(.1)
.50	459	(68.1)	398	(59.0)	181	(26.9)	2	(.3)
.75	1	(.1)	1	(.1)	1	(.1)	5	(.7)
1.00	9	(1.3)	18	(2.7)	3	(.4)	218	(32.3)
1.50	1	(.1)					14	(2.1)
1.75							13	(1.9)
2.00							103	(15.3)
2.50							11	(1.6)
3.00							18	(2.7)
3.50							6	(.9)
4.00							108	(16.0)
Total	674	(100)	674	(100)	674	(100)	674	(100)
	Median=.50 Mode-.50		Median=.50 Mode=.50		Median=.10 Mode=0		Median=1.00 Mode=1.00	

*Health and consumer education categories include units exceeding .25 but less than .50.

Illinois high schools are required to offer courses in art, music and foreign language, but, as shown in Table 4, few school policies require students to take these subjects as a requirement for graduation. Approximately 90% of schools do not require art or music and only three schools require foreign language.

Table 4: Units Required in Music, Art and Foreign Language

No. of Required Units	No. of Schools Requiring Units					
	Music		Art		Foreign Language	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
0.00	611	(90.7)	605	(89.8)	671	(99.6)
0.50	63	(9.3)	66	(9.8)		
1.00			3	(.4)	1	(.1)
2.00					2	(.3)
Total	674	(100)	674	(100)	674	(100)
	Median=0 Mode=0		Median=0 Mode=0		Median=0 Mode=0	

Elective units represent those subject areas which are selected by the student and allowed to accrue toward the required units for graduation. Although electives may include the academic areas, students have the option of selecting subjects in the vocational areas, fine arts and other areas designed for individual needs and interests. As shown in Table 5, the range of elective units begins at zero and extends to 14 units. The data indicate that 46% of the schools allow students to elect eight or more units of the school's graduation requirements, and almost 10% of schools allow students to select ten or more units.

Table 5: Elective Units Required to Complete Minimum Graduation Requirements

No. of Unrestricted Elective Units	No. of Schools	(% of Schools)
0	80	(11.9)
1-1.75	2	(.2)
2-2.75	2	(.3)
3-3.75	10	(1.3)
4-4.75	17	(2.4)
5-5.75	20	(2.8)
6-6.75	103	(15.3)
7-7.75	128	(18.7)
8-8.75	146	(21.7)
9-9.75	98	(14.6)
10-10.75	51	(7.5)
11-11.75	15	(2.2)
12-12.75	1	(.1)
13-13.75	0	(.0)
14.00	1	(.1)
Total	674	(100)

Median=7-7.75
Mode=8-8.75

Restricted electives represent several subject areas from which a student is required to select one or more courses. For example, a graduation requirement might specify a unit in either mathematics or science, or in fine arts or foreign language. This paradox seems to suggest uncertainty regarding the purpose or value of the requirement. Table 6 reports the number of schools which specify restricted electives as a requirement for graduation. More than two-thirds (67.6%) of the schools do not restrict electives. Approximately 24% of schools require one or two restricted electives, while less than 4% require three or more.

Table 6: Restricted Electives Required to Complete Minimum Graduation Requirements

No. of Required Units	No. of Schools	(% of Schools)
0	456	(67.6)
.25-.50	31	(4.5)
1-1.75	74	(10.9)
2-2.75	87	(12.9)
3-3.75	12	(1.7)
4-4.00	6	(.8)
5-5.75	4	(.5)
6-6.00	4	(.5)
Total	674	(100)

Although all schools in Illinois are required to have policies on external credit, the majority of schools do not address the issue in their student handbooks or curriculum guides. Table 7 shows the number of schools reporting such policies.

Table 7: Schools Reporting Policies on Credit from External Sources

Sources of Credit for Graduation	No. of Schools	
	Policy stated in school handbook	No policy reported in school handbook
Community College	108	552
Correspondence Course	161	499
Summer School	137	523
Evening School	48	612
Proficiency Exam	15	645
Adult Education	22	638
Military Experience	6	654
Life Experience	2	658
Other Source	111	549
Not Allowed	1	659

Large City School Data

How does Illinois' largest city school district compare with other selected large city school districts across the nation, and how does Illinois compare with other states and the nation? Answers to these questions were obtained from telephone inquiries to school districts outside Illinois.

Because the Chicago school district accounts for nearly 20% of the Illinois' secondary student enrollment, Chicago's graduation requirements were compared with those of other large city school districts: Dallas, Denver, New York City, and Oakland, California (See Appendix C for a list of school district officials interviewed).

Table 8 shows graduation requirements for these five large city high school systems. Chicago schools require fewer total units to graduate (18) than the other large city school systems. This is due to the fact that Chicago awards a quarter unit for each year's participation in required PE/health while the other cities award 1 unit for each year of required PE/health participation. Chicago schools require one less unit of math and science than either Dallas or Denver, but also requires a half unit in art and music which neither Dallas nor Denver require. New York City schools require 1 more unit of math and science than Chicago schools, but also require 3 fewer elective units than Chicago schools. Oakland (CA) schools require a half unit more in social studies and a half unit more in foreign language than Chicago schools, but require no art or music and one less unit in English. Overall, Chicago schools' graduation requirements are comparable to those of other major cities with some minimal differences.

Table 8: Comparison of Large City School Requirements for Graduation

	Chicago	Dallas	Denver	New York City	Oakland, Ca.
Total Units	18	19	21	19	21
English	4	3	4	4	3
Math	*1	2	2	2	2
Science	*1	2	2	2	1
Social Studies	3	2.5	2.5	3	3.5
P.E./Health	1.0	2.0	1.0	4	3.0
Art	0.5	-		0.5	
Music	0.5	-		0.5	
Foreign Language					0.5
Electives	6	7.0	9.5	3	8.0

*One additional unit of either math or science is also required.

National Data

Data collected by a survey from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Association of State Migrant Directors (1982) were disseminated by the Education Commission of the States and used in the analysis. From a national perspective, Table 8 displays the number of states including the District of Columbia, which have graduation requirements lower, equal to, or greater than Illinois. Illinois is at approximately the mid-point of the nation with about one-fourth of the states having lower state requirements, one-fourth having equal requirements and about half or more of the states having higher requirements. Illinois is one of only three states requiring physical education for four years. No attempt in this paper was made to determine the relationship of state requirements to proportion of state aid to schools.

Table 9: Comparison of Graduation Requirements in Illinois with those in Other States

Units Required	No. of States Below Ill. Requirements		No. of States Exceeding Ill. Requirements		No. of States with the Same Requirements	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Units for Graduation	15	(29.4)	24	(47.1)	12	(23.5)
English (3)	13	(25.5)	23	(45.2)	15	(29.4)
Math (0)	0		34	(66.7)	17	(33.3)
Science (1)	0		36	(70.6)	15	(29.4)
Soc. St. (1)	10	(19.6)	34	(66.7)	7	(13.7)
*P.E. (4)	48	(94.1)	0		3	(5.8)

*Ill. requires 4 years of P.E. The NCES survey reported Illinois as requiring 0 Units. Illinois data are shown as corrected.

Table 9 shows the number of total units required for graduation, regardless of subject, across the nation. Illinois requires 16 units. Only twelve states do not regulate unit requirements for graduation. Almost 24% of the states require 16 units, 16% require 18 units and almost 14% require 20 units. Of those states having requirements, approximately 6% require less than 16 units and 47% require more than 16 units.

Table 10: Units Required by States for Graduation

No. of Required Units	No. of States	(% of States)
0.0	12	(23.5)
13.00	1	(2.0)
15.00	2	(3.9)
*16.00	12	(23.5)
17.00	4	(7.8)
17.50	1	(2.0)
18.00	8	(15.7)
19.00	2	(3.9)
20.00	7	(13.7)
21.00	1	(2.0)
22.50	1	(2.0)
Total	51	(100.0)

Median = 16.19. Mode = 16.00.
*Indicates Illinois requirements.

The requirements in four academic areas and physical education are in Table 11. Of those states with specified requirements for graduation, more than 45% require 4 or more units of English, while the remaining 35% require fewer than 4 units. In mathematics, approximately 19% of the states require 2 or more units, while 47% require one unit. Almost 53% of the states require one unit in science and almost 18% require two units. Nearly a quarter (23%) of states require less than two units of social studies and approximately 22% require three or more units. Thirty-five percent of states require at least one unit of physical education, and 5% require four units. The remaining 20% of states require more than one but less than four units of physical education. Illinois requires less English, math, science, and social studies than most other states, but more in physical education.

Table 11: Units Required by States for Specific Subject Areas

# of Required Units	No. of States Requiring Units									
	English		Math		Science		Soc. St.		*P.E.	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
0.00	11	(21.6)	**17	(33.3)	**15	(29.4)	9	(17.6)	19	(39.2)
.50					1	(2.0)			2	(4.0)
1.00	2	(3.9)	24	(47.1)	27	(52.9)	**7	(13.7)	16	(31.4)
1.50							5	(9.8)	5	(9.8)
2.00			9	(17.6)	9	(17.6)	16	(31.4)	5	(9.8)
2.50							2	(3.9)	1	(2.0)
3.00	**15	(29.4)	1	(2.0)			8	(15.7)		
3.50	1	(2.0)					1	(2.0)		
4.00	21	(41.2)					1	(2.0)	**3	(5.8)
4.50							1	(2.0)		
5.00										
6.00	1	(2.0)								
Total	51	(100)	51	(100)	51	(100)	51	(100)	51	(100)

*This survey reported Illinois as requiring 0 units in P.E. This has been corrected to show 4 units.
**Indicates Illinois' Requirement.

Unrestricted electives represent those courses from which a student may select units in order to meet graduation requirements. Table 12 shows the number of unrestricted and restricted electives allowed by states to meet the minimum number of units required for graduation.

Approximately 25% of the states allow eight units and approximately 37% allow eight or more units to be used as unrestricted electives. Restricted electives are units which must be selected from specific subjects, but which are not limited to a single subject. More than 82% of the subjects allow no restricted electives and 12% require one more more units of restricted electives. One state requires ten restricted electives. In comparison with most states, Illinois allows 8 units of unrestricted electives, which places it in the upper half of those states permitting students to elect 8 or more units.

Table 12: Units of Electives Remaining After Satisfying Subject Area Requirements

	Unrestricted Electives		Restricted Electives	
No. of Electives	No. of States	Percent	No. of States	Percent
0.00	19	(37.3)	42	(82.4)
.50			3	(5.9)
1.50			1	(2.0)
3.00			2	(3.9)
3.33			1	(2.0)
4.00			1	(2.0)
6.00	2	(3.9)		
6.50	4	(7.8)		
7.00	6	(11.8)		
7.50	1	(2.0)		
8.00	*8	(15.6)		
8.50	4	(7.8)		
9.00	4	(7.8)		
9.50	1	(2.0)		
10.00	1	(2.0)	1	(2.0)
10.50	1	(2.0)		
Total	51	(100)	51	(100)

*Indicates Illinois' no. of electives.

A nationwide survey of high school graduation requirements was recently conducted by Westat, Inc., under contract with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in support of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). The study focused upon (a) the credits required for graduation; (b) the units of credit required from the core subject areas of English, math, science, social studies and foreign languages; (c) district policies regarding minimum competency testing and assignment of homework; (d) measures of academic achievement (i.e., SAT and ACT scores); and (e) activities implemented or planned to improve academic achievement.

The survey sampled 571 school districts representative of the national population of 11,370 school districts with high schools. Table 13 compares the statistics from this study with comparable Illinois public school data. Unfortunately, the Westat study used mean scores solely which limits comparisons of the typical or usual practice.

Table 13: Comparison of Illinois Averages with National Averages Based upon the NCES Survey for the National Commission on Excellence in Education

	National Averages	Illinois Averages		
	Mean	Mean	Median	Mode
Number of Credits Total	19.8	17.44	18.00	18.00
Number of Credits Core Subjects	9.5	6.99	7.00	7.00
English Credits	3.6	3.16	3.00	3.00
Math Credits	1.7	1.05	1.00	1.00
Science Credits	1.6	1.03	1.00	1.00
Social Studies Credits	2.6	1.75	2.00	2.00
Foreign Language Credits	*	*	*	*
P.E./Health Credits	1.7	1.49	1.00	1.00
% of Schools with MCT	25%		14.2%	

*Less than .1

Except for foreign language requirements, where the Illinois average is similar to the average for the nation, Illinois averages for specific graduation requirements are less than those of the nation. These differences may be due to methodological differences in compiling the data. State Board staff analyzed specific documents assumed to contain such information. Westat, Inc. collected data verbally from staff in each state.Specifically, the NCES study defined a unit of credit as a class scheduled for a minimum of 200 minutes per week for 36 weeks, while the Illinois study is based upon a unit of credit defined as a daily period of instruction throughout the school year or the equivalent. The NCES report does not indicate how classes involving more than 200 minutes of weekly instruction were described in terms of units of credit. Thus, it is unknown if a 250 minute class was included in computations as 1.25 units of credit or 1.0 unit of credit.

More importantly, the NCES study reported inconclusive findings regarding the relationships between academic achievement measures (ACT and SAT scores) and differences in graduation requirements except with respect to concentrations of economically disadvantaged (Title I) children. A significant negative relationship was reported between the achievement measures and the percentage of students eligible for Title I, which means that achievement scores decrease as the numbers of students from low-income families increase. This reaffirms the dramatic relationship between poverty and student achievement. A significant positive relationship was reported between SAT scores and length of time in credit courses, but no signficant relationship was reported between length of time and ACT scores. THe NCES report states:

> The failure to find a consistent pattern of positive relationships between requirements and achievement may arise from a number of factors. First, there is a tendency for school districts with lower student achievement to raise formal requirements as a strategy for improving achievement, while higher achieving districts see less need for this type of action. The survey findings support this, in that districts with the fewest percents of students eligible for ESEA Title I assistance (currently Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act) have the highest achievement even though their requirements are the same or lower than other districts. Second, in some districts, higher requirements are the result of recent policy changes to counteract low achievement. These policies may not have been in effect long enough to result in measurable differences in achievement. For example, policies enacted in the 1981-82 school year would have minimal effect on the achievement of students in 1981-82, but may influence the achievement test performance of students in later years. Third, since these data reflect aggregate district averages, significant effects are more difficult to isolate than if students were the unit of analysis. Fourth, the average achievement scores of small districts are subject to signficant variability because they are based on relatively few students.

Moreover, some variables that have been linked to achievement in other studies could not be measured in this survey. Among these variables are the quality of education, level of student preparation on entering high school, student motivation, teacher expectations, and per pupil expenditure.

The data on which the public most often evaluates achievement levels for high school students are the scores from the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the scores from the American College Testing Program (ACT). Illinois and national data from both of these testing programs are displayed graphically in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

The SAT score has two dimensions: Verbal and Mathematics. Figure 1 shows the yearly average scores of pupils in Illinois compared to national average scores. The Illinois averages on both the Verbal and Math tests have been consistently above the national averages every year from 1969 through 1982. Both the Illinois and national Math scores have been consistently higher than the Verbal scores through the same period. Further, while national Math scores have declined by some 5.27% (from 493 in 1969 to 467 in 1982) and the Illinois average Math scores over the same period have declined by less than 1.0% (from 518 in 1969 to 515 in 1982) the respective Verbal scores have declined by 7.99% nationally and by 5.5% for Illinois. Based on these data, declines in Verbal scores have been greater than the declines in Math scores, despite the fact that graduation requirements in English have been higher than those for Math.

Further, analysis similar to that performed in the NCES study was conducted to determine any relationships between the SAT scores among the states and their respective graduation requirements. While controlling for the varying percentage of pupils taking the tests in the 50 states, the state's course requirements in the areas of English and math were compared to their respective SAT Verbal and Math scores. The results indicated no significant relationship between English course requirements and Verbal SAT scores; but in the case of SAT Math scores, a minimal negative significant relationship was found. This means that states with low mathematics course requirements tended to have higher average SAT Math scores than the states with higher math course requirements.

In the case of the ACT, students are tested in English, social studies, math and science. Both the national and Illinois averages for each subject area covered by the test from 1968 through 1982 are displayed in Table 14 and shown graphically in Figures 2 and 3. Table 14 shows that Illinois students had scored at or above the national averages in all four subject areas until 1976, and subsequently have scored slightly below the national average in science each year, in English and social studies in 1978, and in English in 1979.

FIGURE 1. ILLINOIS AND NATIONAL SAT SCORES

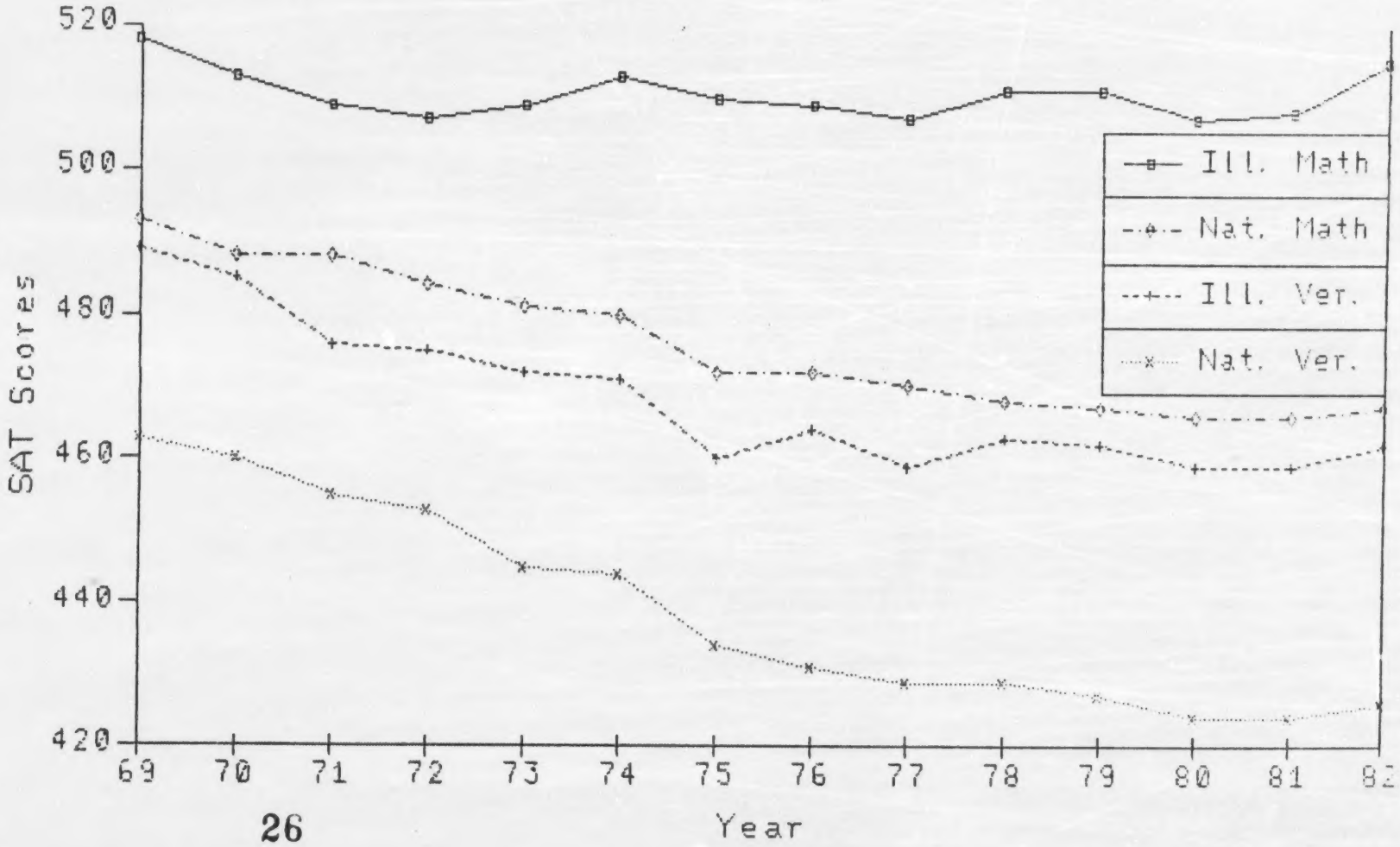

FIGURE 2. NATIONAL ACT SCORES

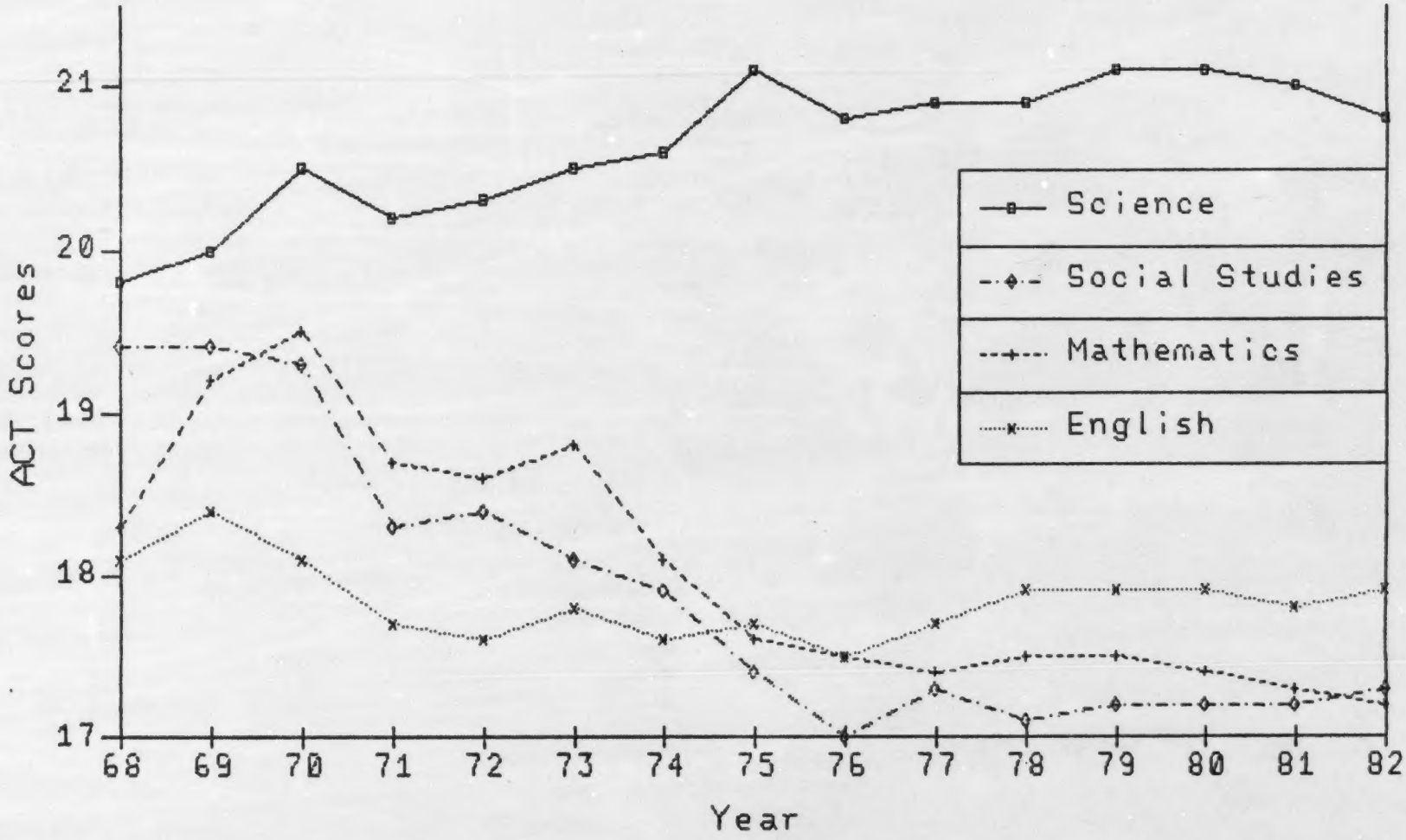

FIGURE 3. ILLINOIS ACT SCORES

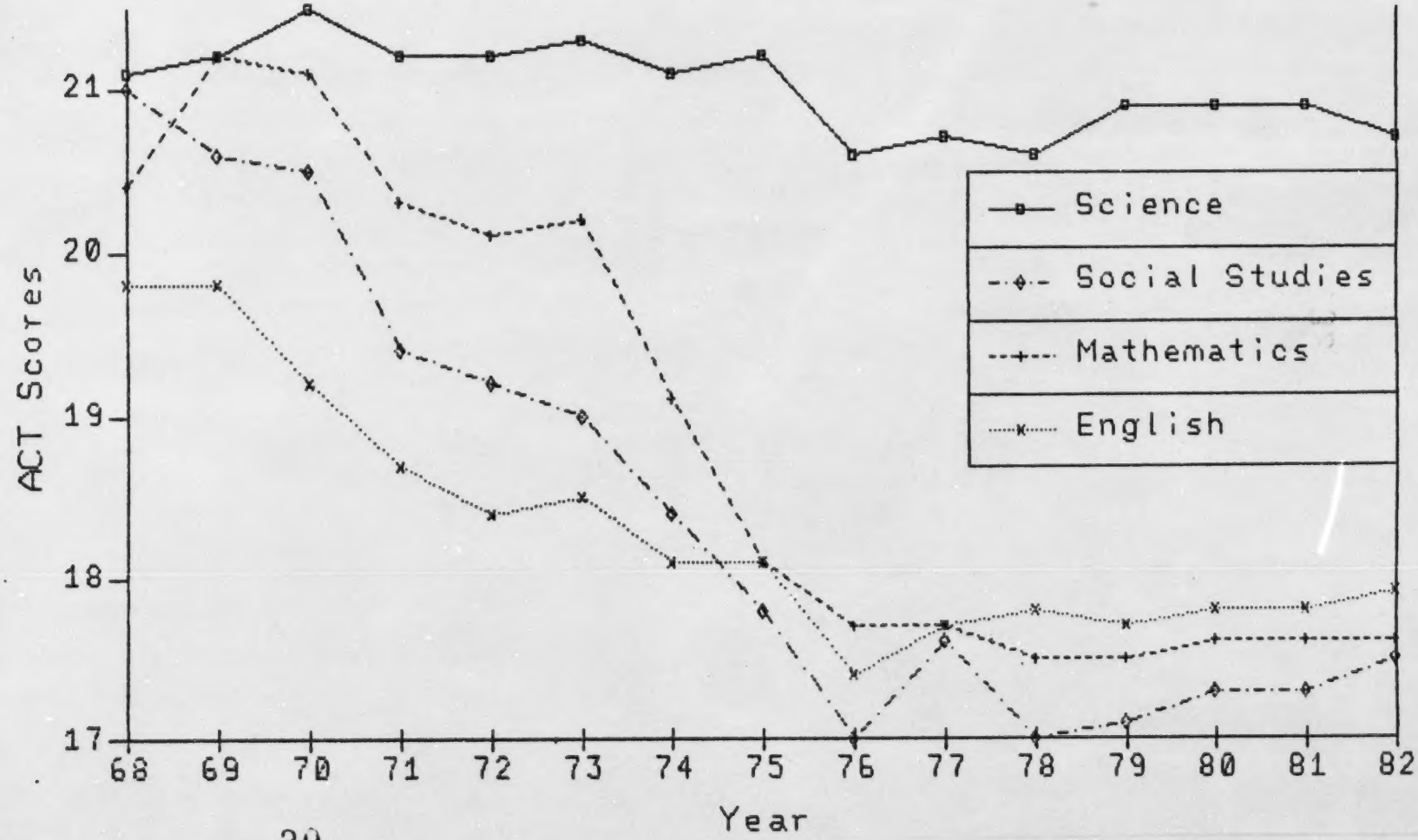

Table 14: ACT Means for Illinois and National (U.S.) Students

School Year	English		Mathematics		Social Studies		Nat. Science	
	Illinois	U.S.	Illinois	U.S.	Illinois	U.S.	Illinois	U.S.
1968	19.8	18.1	20.4	18.3	21.0	19.4	21.1	19.8
1969	19.8	18.4	21.2	19.2	20.6	19.4	21.2	20.0
1970	19.2	18.1	21.1	19.5	20.5	19.3	21.5	20.5
1971	18.7	17.7	20.3	18.7	19.4	18.3	21.2	20.2
1972	18.4	17.6	20.1	18.6	19.2	18.4	21.2	20.3
1973	18.5	17.8	20.2	18.8	19.0	18.1	21.3	20.5
1974	18.1	17.6	19.1	18.1	18.4	17.9	21.1	20.6
1975	18.1	17.7	18.1	17.6	17.8	17.4	21.2	21.1
1976	17.4	17.5	17.7	17.5	17.0	17.0	20.6	20.8
1977	17.7	17.7	17.7	17.4	17.6	17.3	20.7	20.9
1978	17.8	17.9	17.5	17.5	17.0	17.1	20.6	20.9
1979	17.7	17.9	17.5	17.5	17.1	17.2	20.9	21.1
1980	17.8	17.9	17.6	17.4	17.3	17.2	20.9	21.1
1981	17.8	17.8	17.6	17.3	17.3	17.2	20.9	21.0
1982	17.9	17.9	17.6	17.2	17.5	17.3	20.7	20.8

Figures 2 and 3 show that Illinois and national average scores in English, math and social studies, have declined over this 14 year period. The greatest proportionate declines in scores were in the area of social studies where the national average declined by 10.8% and the Illinois average declined 16.6%. Nationally, science scores have increased despite minimal state requirements in science. In Illinois, although there are minimal requirements in science, science scores show less decline than scores in any other subject. Neither the SAT nor ACT data display a discernable relationship between course requirements and academic achievement in Illinois or nationally.

Despite the fact that both the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing Program Test (ACT) mean results for the states are a function of the percentage of pupils taking the tests in the various states, the public is often urged to evaluate achievement levels for high school students based upon the results of these tests. While the use of the SAT results to evaluate achievement of Illinois high school students may be criticized because less than 14% of Illinois public and nonpublic graduates participate in the testing program, such is not the case with the ACT. In the 1981-82 school year, for example, more than 67% of all Illinois high school graduates took the ACT. Further, in the 14 years since the 1967-68 school year, more than 55% of all Illinois' graduates have taken the ACT each year. Thus, while the results of analysis of the SAT scores might be ignored because of the limited proportion of Illinois pupils tested, the ACT scores cannot be ignored. The ACT scores show no discernable relationship between course requirements and academic achievement for Illinois.

Summary

This report analyzes current high school graduation requirements in Illinois based on data compiled from local school documents and compares the data to statistics nationally, from other states, and selected large city schools. This analysis was conducted because of a concern about declining achievement levels of high school graduates. It is an attempt to provide an objective base for decisions regarding the issue of educational quality.

The study concludes that the quantity of graduation requirements appear to have no discernible effect on achievement other than a slight negative tendency for math test scores to decline as requirements increase (SAT). Comparisons of two approaches being proposed in Illinois for increasing student knowledge and, therefore, achievement, lead to the conclusion that in all probability, an increase in graduation requirements through requiring additional courses will prove to be of limited value. On the other hand, the establishment of outcome statements for students which specifically describe what students are expected to know and be able to do in the various subjects, appears to be more rational and is supported as a strategy by several prestigious university-level groups. It is also compatible with well-established educational research and practice.

Last, but by all means not least, this study confirms what has been believed by many, disputed by a few, and misunderstood by virtually all: the high school diploma means different things in different states; different things among various school districts within a state, and even, in some rare cases, between high schools within the same district. In other words, this regularly used device for certifying that students have successfully completed a secondary school program is by itself totally and unequivocally unreliable, except, probably as a measure of staying power. The proposed bills will not prevent this.

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1790h

Appendix A

SENATE BILL NO. 0669

83rd GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State of Illinois

1983 and 1984

Introduced April 7, 1983, by Senator Collins

SYNOPSIS

(Ch. 122, new par. 27-22)

Amends The School Code to require a high school pupil to take and complete specified lengths of courses in language arts, math, science, social studies and others as a prerequisite to obtaining a diploma. Applies to pupils entering the 9th grade in 1984-1985 school year and thereafter.

LRB8304682RCjw

Fiscal Note Act
may be applicable

A BILL FOR

AN ACT to add Section 27-22 to "The School Code", approved March 18, 1961, as amended.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois, represented in the General Assembly:

Section 1. Section 27-22 is added to "The School Code", approved March 18, 1961, as amended, the added Section to read as follows:

(Ch. 122, new par. 27-22)

Sec. 27-22. Required high school courses. As a pre-requisite to receiving a high school diploma, each pupil must, in addition to other course requirements, study and successfully complete the following courses:

1. in a 4 year high school, 3 years of language arts, or in a 3 year high school, 2 years of language arts;

2. two years of mathematics;

3. two years of science;

4. two years of social studies, of which at least one year must be history of the United States or a combination of history of the United States and American government; and

5. One year chosen from (A) music, (B) art or (C) foreign language.

This amendatory Act of 1983 does not apply to pupils entering the 9th grade in 1983-1984 school year and prior school years.

HOUSE BILL 1179

83rd GENERAL ASSEMBLY

State of Illinois

1983 and 1984

Introduced April 7, 1983, By Representative Breslin

SYNOPSIS

(Ch. 122, new par. 27-22)

Amends The School Code to require a high school pupil to take and complete specified lengths of courses in language arts, math, science, social studies and others as a prerequisite to obtaining a diploma. Applies to pupils entering the 9th grade in 1984-1985 school year and thereafter.

LRB8304682RCjw

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40

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1. in a 4 year high school, 3 years of language arts, or in a 3 year high school, 2 years of language arts;

2. two years of mathematics;

3. two years of science;

4. two years of social studies, of which at least one year must be history of the United States or a combination of history of the United States and American government; and

5. One year chosen from (A) music, (B) art or (C) foreign language.

This amendatory Act of 1983 does not apply to pupils entering the 9th grade in 1983-1984 school year and prior school years.

Appendix B

	CC
1. Code Region, County, and School District	REG CNTY DIST
2. Code Record Type (0 = School Record, 1 = District Record), and School Number	10 11 14
3. Code District Type (2 digit code), School Type (4 = 4yr H.S., 3 = 3yr H.S., 2 = 2yr H.S., 1 = Other)	15 16 17 0 0
4. Code School Calendar (1 = Semester System, 2 = Quarter System, 3 = Modular System, 4 = Flex System)	18
5. Enter the total number of UNITS required to Graduate from this School	19 20 21
6. Enter the number of elective courses necessary to earn the Units specified in #5 above.	23 24 25
6a. Enter the number of restricted elective courses necessary to accumulate the units in #5 above.	27 28 29
7. Enter the number of units in each of the following subject areas included in #5 above.	
A. ENGLISH	31
B. MATH	34
C. SCIENCE	39
D. SOC. STUDIES	40
E. HEALTH	43
F. CONS. ED.	46
G. DRVRS. ED.	49
H. P. E.	52
I. FOREIGN LANG.	55
J. ART	58
K. MUSIC	61
7a. Can Units be earned through participation in student activities? b. How many?	64 a. 65 b 66
8. Is a MINIMUM COMPETENCY TEST required to graduate? 1 = yes 0 = otherwise	65
9. Are thereHigh School admission standards required/recommended? 1 = yes 0 = otherwise	69
10. Are district graduation requirements uniform for all schools in the district? 1 = yes, 2 = no 0 = Not applicable	70
11. Does the document indicate: a.) a maximum pupil load, 1 = yes; b.) What is it?	71 a 72 b 73
12. Does the document indicate: a.) a minimum pupil load, 1 = yes; b.) What is it?	75 a 76 77
13. Are exceptions to 11a above specified for gifted pupils 13a = 1 if yes, Are there exceptions to 12a above for seniors or others 13b = 1 if yes; Both 13a and 13b = 0 if otherwise.	74 a 80 b

14. What kinds of performance indicators are used?
a.) Letter grades b.) Numeric grades c.) Pass/Fail d.) Other

15. What achievement standards are used?
a.) Passing grades b.) Ave. or Higher grades c.) M.C.T.
d.) Achievement test

16. What types of Graduation Documentation are issued?
a.) Regular diploma b.) Cert. of Attnd. c.) Lettr of Compl.
d.) Differentiated Diploma

17. Is early graduation provided for after
a.) 7 semesters b.) 6 semesters c.) sooner than 6 semesters
d.) Not specified e.) Not allowed.

18. Does policy allow units to be earned from: a.) community colleges,
b.) correspondence courses, c.) summer school, d.) evening school,
e.) proficiency exam, f.) Adult education, g.) military experience,
h.) life experience, i.) other source, j.) not allowed.

19. Are any of the following courses required but yield no units toward graduation total? a.) P.E., b.) Drivers Ed., c.) Consumer Ed., d.) Health, e.) Band or Chorus.

20. How is the Constitution Test requirement met?
a.) Inc. in required course, b.) Inc. in elective course,
c.) Mini course, d.) profic test.

21. How is the Consumer Ed. requirement met?
a.) Inc. in required course, b.) Inc. in elective course,
c.) Mini course, d.) profic test.

22. Did the document indicate courses of study for: a.) College Prep.,
b.) Voc. Prep., c.) General Prep., d.) GED Prep., e.) Other objective

23. Were there different graduation requirements for any of the above 22a, 22b, 22c, 22d, or 22e?

24. Do graduation policies address the circumstances/needs of:
a.) Gifted pupils, b.) Spec. Ed. pupils, c.) Migrant pupils,
d.) Vocational pupils, e.) potential drop-outs.

25. If 24 is yes for any of these groups, are policies more strict or less strict than general policy? 1 = more strict, 2= less strict.

26. Does the document deal with the issue/problem of transfer of units from other schools?

27. Are there policies worthy of special note imposed by this school?
a. regarding units required to graduate. b. regarding special requirements or courses. c. regarding diploma's or other documentation. d. regarding early graduation or transfer pupils.
e. regarding other matters.

REVIEWER PENDING MORE INFO DATA ENTRY COMPLETED

44

Appendix C

45

Representatives Contacted in Selected Large Cities and States

DALLAS - Mrs. Humphries - 214/824-1620

DENVER - Mrs. Larue Belcher - 303/837-1000

NEW YORK CITY - Mr. Ken Fanizzi - 212/596-6100

OAKLAND, Calif. - Dr. Haig, Ass't. for Secondary Ed. - 415/836-8292

KENTUCKY-State Educational Agency - Mr. Clyde Caudall - 502/564-4399
Office of Research & Planning

INDIANA - State Educational Agency - Mr. John Harold - 317/927-0111
Curriculum Office